



Context-specific achievement goal orientations in cooperative group work



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ABSTRACT

This study explored how trichotomous achievement goal orientations in each of three contexts (i.e., individual, individual-within-a-group, and group; Kim, Kim, & Svinicki, 2012) play different roles in predicting college students' enjoyment, sense of group community, and evaluation of group work processes during laboratory cooperative group work. We asked 174 undergraduate students to complete individual and group-related achievement goal orientation measures before and after participating in group work. The results indicated that individual and group-related achievement goal orientations in a cooperative group work setting strongly predicted the affective and cognitive variables and that these associations varied among the goals. For example, both individual-within-a-group performance-approach goal orientations and group performance-approach goal orientations were positively associated with the related affective and cognitive variables, whereas individual performance-approach goal orientations were negatively associated with those variables. Implications for current achievement goal orientation theory in a cooperative group work context are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Recent reports have highlighted not only the positive effects of group work on students' affective and cognitive variables but also increasing educational standards and curricula that require students' group work. However, there remains a lack of understanding of how and why group work, as an instructional method, shapes affective and cognitive experiences (e.g., Pintrich, Conley, & Kempler, 2003; Slavin, 1996). A majority of studies examining motivational experiences in group work involved only individual goals, although increased efforts have been made to better understand students' adoption of goals that are specific to group work context (e.g., Blazevski, McKendrick, & Hruda, 2005; Hijzen, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2007; Kim, Kim, & Svinicki, 2012; Summers, 2006). We support the importance of examining the relative contribution of context-specific goals in predicting various affective and cognitive experiences in group work context. In particular, this study examined the role of context-specific goal orientations, using a recently developed 3 × 3 achievement goal orientation framework (Kim et al., 2012) to predict affective and cognitive experiences during group work.

1.1. Achievement goal orientations in cooperative group work

Since the 1980s, achievement goal orientation theory has received considerable attention (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988) by explaining how students' pursuits of different types of individual goals predict different types of engagement with an academic task. Under the 2 × 2 achievement goals model (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001), students' adoption of mastery-approach goals, which focus on developing competence during engagement in a task, has been shown to be a positive predictor of adaptive patterns of behavior, such as engagement, achievement, and enjoyment in learning (Ames, 1992b; Linnenbrink, 2005; Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2006). Conversely, students' adoption of mastery-avoidance or performance-avoidance goals, which focus on avoiding failure compared with their previous achievements or those of other students, has been shown to be related to maladaptive patterns of cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes (Elliot & Church, 1997; Pekrun et al., 2006). Finally, students' adoption of performance-approach goals, which focus on demonstrating competence during engagement in a task, has been shown to produce mixed achievement results (Elliot & Church, 1997; Linnenbrink, 2005). Compared with earlier theoretical investigations of achievement goal orientations, which involved more person-based approaches (e.g., McClelland, 1961), more recent studies have increasingly shown the importance of context in triggering and shaping individual motivations and goal orientations

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(Ames, 1992a; Ames & Archer, 1988; Anderman, Patrick, Hruda, & Linnenbrink, 2002; Pintrich et al., 2003).

In this study, we claim that cooperative group work, which has been increasingly required by educational standards and curricula, is an important learning context that requires our attention. Growing research has supported the beneficial and adaptive role of group work contexts in educational outcomes, such as intrinsic motivation, deeper processing, support of basic psychological needs (Hanze & Berger, 2007), higher academic achievement (Slavin, 1996), and self-efficacy (Nichols & Miller, 1994). According to Slavin (1983, 1996), during cooperative learning, cooperative incentive structures require group members to attain their personal goals only if the “group is successful” (1996, p. 44); thus, to attain group rewards, group members develop an interpersonal reward structure. Specifically, Slavin proposed that group goals help enhance learning outcomes by (a) producing group cohesiveness, (b) motivating students to be responsible for one another, and (c) directly motivating students to engage in cognitive processes.

To better understand students' motivational experiences in cooperative learning contexts, studies have increasingly investigated the role of students' adoption of different achievement goal orientations in their particular group learning contexts. Similar to what has been found in non-group learning contexts, students' adoption of mastery goal orientations during group learning has been found to be positively related to better learning experiences. Positive outcomes include engagement and a sense of community (Summers & Svinicki, 2007), their concerns about learning and understanding (Levy, Kaplan, & Patrick, 2004), enhanced learning when faced with disagreements among team members (Darnon, Butera, & Harackiewicz, 2007), and various cognitive and affective outcomes (e.g., achievement) in elementary school students (Linnenbrink, 2005). However, students' adoption of performance-approach goals has been found to be detrimental to most cognitive and affective outcomes (Linnenbrink, 2005) or not related to a sense of community in group work (Summers & Svinicki, 2007). Interestingly, Summers and Svinicki (2007) found that performance-avoidance goal orientation predicted college students' sense of classroom community during interactive learning.

Although the above studies have investigated students' *individual* achievement goal orientations in the group work context, recent studies have attempted to understand the motivation, goals, and goal orientations that are specific to group work contexts. For example, in examining secondary vocational students' effective group learning processes by exploring the full range of goal preferences, Hijzen et al. (2007) found that not only mastery but also social responsibility (“It's all about cooperation, alone you are nothing. Therefore it is important to learn how to do it”) and social support goals (“It is important to support each other, like “Can I help you?””) were prevalent in effective teams. They reported that a great deal of learning success could be attributed to individuals' tendencies to pursue goals for the sake of the group. Similarly, Summers (2006) examined the role of shared achievement and social goals that individuals adopted after collaborative learning, along with their pre-individual achievement goal orientations, in predicting sixth-graders' post-individual achievement goal orientations, as measured after small-group work. Summers found that students' shared achievement goals and pre-individual mastery goal orientations positively predicted their post-individual mastery goal orientations.

With respect to performance goals, Hijzen et al. (2007) found that superiority goals, which we assume to be similar to individual performance orientations, were more commonly observed in ineffective teams. Blazeovski et al. (2005) further investigated the impacts of both individual and group achievement goal orientations on college students' social loafing behaviors and found that when students had high group performance goal orientations (“We wanted to do the problems better than the other groups”), rather than group mastery goal orientations (“We tried to get better at solving the problems as we went along”), they were more likely to be social loafers, i.e., show less effort than

other group members. However, Tauer and Harackiewicz (2004) reported that a combination of intergroup competition and within-group cooperation, compared with pure competition or cooperation, led to more enjoyment and better performance, which also agrees with Linnenbrink (2005). Interestingly, with respect to performance-avoidance goals, Summers found that students who adopted high levels of shared achievement goals were more likely to adopt performance-avoidance goal orientations over time. Summers (2006) assumed that within-group interactions might sensitize students to others' evaluations and thus prompt them to adopt “motivational goals of self-protection” (p. 286).

Expanding upon previous attempts (Blazeovski et al., 2005; Summers, 2006), Kim et al. (2012) proposed a 3 (contexts) \times 3 (goal orientations) achievement goal orientation, which the current study has used and examined as a framework. They conceptualized three different contexts (i.e., individual, individual-within-a-group, and group; please see Note 1) for trichotomous goal orientations (i.e., mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance). According to Kim et al. (2012), these orientations depend on whether (a) the agent who adopts the goal orientations is an individual (i.e., “I”) or a collective (i.e., “we”) and (b) the agent is concerned with individual or group competence. For example, if an individual adopts *individual* goal orientations, he/she focuses on increasing his/her own competence (mastery) or demonstrating his/her own competence relative to others (performance). If an individual adopts *individual-within-a-group* goal orientations, he/she focuses on contributing his/her own competence to increase his/her group's competence (mastery) or demonstrating his/her group's competence relative to other groups (performance). Finally, for *group* goal orientations, the group focuses on increasing the group's competence (mastery) or demonstrating the group's competence relative to other groups (performance). We present examples of the items in Table 1.

According to Kim et al. (2012), although the goal orientations in the individual-within-a-group context appear to be similar to social goals, students with individual-within-a-group goals will have underlying academic purposes (e.g., “increase/demonstrate his or her groups' competence through his or her own contribution” (p. 359)), which differentiate these goal orientations from existing social goals. Kim et al. (2012) validated the 3 \times 3 achievement goal orientation measure using confirmatory factor analyses, supporting the idea that students can differentiate their interrelated but theoretically different goals from three subcontexts. However, they did not examine each goal's relative contribution in predicting various affective and cognitive variables in different subcontexts, which will be the aim of the current study.

1.2. The current study

Adopting the 3 \times 3 achievement goal orientation model, this study examined the different roles and relative contributions of college students' different orientations (i.e., mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance in each context) in explaining each of the major affective and cognitive variables. These dependent variables included students' enjoyment during group work, their sense of group community, and their evaluations of their group work process, which were selected as good indicators of positive group-learning experiences (e.g., Summers, Beretvas, Svinicki, & Gorin, 2005). We explored these relationships in the context of a laboratory group learning setting in which college students from various majors solved crossword puzzles together. We formulated and addressed the following questions: When all goal orientations are included and controlled, what are the relative roles and contributions of college students' achievement goal orientations in predicting the affective and cognitive variables? In particular, when the goal orientations are measured before and after the group work, what types of pretest or posttest achievement goal orientations predict the relevant variables in the group work context, and

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